CA1 EP 60088M01
Canada. FEARO.
MANUAL ON PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT: PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS. VOLUME 1. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS. 1988.

CA 1 EP60088M01

3 1761 05686929 0

FOREWORD

This manual on public involvement in environmental impact assessment is long overdue. Ever since it was established in 1973, the federal Environmental Assessment and Review Process (EARP) has been firmly committed to the principle and practice of public involvement in decision-making.

Over the past 15 years, a considerable body of knowledge and experience in public involvement has developed within the environmental impact assessment community as well as within other planning systems. The Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office believes it is time to consolidate this knowledge and experience and to make it available to government agencies in a handbook format. This manual on public involvement is the result.

It is designed to be a reference manual for those with responsibility for planning and implementing public involvement programs as part of the EARP requirements. It is focussed on the early screening and scoping stages of the process and oriented primarily to small and medium sized projects that may not undergo formal public reviews. However, the principles and procedures have application to later stages as well. The operative words in the manual are planning *and* implementation. That is, it is intended as a practical user's guide.

The authors of the manual were well aware that public involvement programs of an organization cannot be successful without the understanding and support of its senior management. With that in mind, they have included an Executive Overview to summarize the main ideas for senior managers.

The Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office believes that effective implementation of the methods and techniques for public involvement outlined in the manual will assist government departments in making sound decisions. We anticipate revising the manual from time to time in light of experience and will welcome comments from users.

Raymond M. Robinson
Executive Chairman

Earth Sciences Library

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
University of Toronto

https://archive.org/details/31761056869290

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 3

Purpose of the Manual 5

Organization of the Manual 5

Context of Public Involvement 7

What is Public Involvement 7
Goals of Public Involvement 7
When is Public Involvement Needed 8
Who is the Public 8

Planning for Public Involvement 11

Reasons for Preparing a Public Involvement Plan 16

Support from Decision Makers and Senior Management 19

Senior Management Review and Support 19
Public Involvement is Integral to Project Planning 19
Initiating Public Involvement Within the Agency 20
Recognizing Time and Budget Requirements 20
Direct Involvement of Senior Management 21
Knowing When a Project is in Trouble 21

Staffing and Organizational Requirements for Public Involvement 23

Organizational Decision Making Style 23
Performance Measurements 23
Providing a Model of Open Communication 23
Public Involvement within the Organization 24
Coordination within the Agency 25
Hints to Decision Makers Reviewing Public Involvement Programs 27

Trends in Public Involvement 29

Developing an Ongoing Issues Management System 29
Environmental Mediation and Concensus Building Approaches 31

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

VOLUME 1

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praxis would like to acknowledge the extensive contributions of the team members and Steering Committee on this project. The study team members played a variety of roles from detailed writing and analysis, to review and ongoing contributions. In particular, Jim Creighton, Bruce Fraser and Desmond Connor provided some of their own materials which have been directly used or modified in the development of this manual.

Praxis would also like to thank the interdepartmental steering committee established under the auspices of the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office (FEARO).

Special thanks go to the Steering Committee Chairperson, Dr. Gordon Beanlands, from FEARO.

Membership of the Federal Government Steering Committee

Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office
Department of the Environment
Transport Canada
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Canada Oil and Gas Lands Administration
Energy, Mines and Resources
Environment Canada, Parks
Public Works Canada

Core Study Team

Praxis Calgary, Alberta	**Richard Roberts** **Sarah Kipp** **Maureen Bush**
Creighton & Creighton Palo Alto, California	**Jim Creighton**
Pacific Rim Consultants Victoria, B.C.	**Bruce Fraser**

Regional Team Members

Desmond Connor,
Connor Development Services
Victoria, B.C.

Jean Rene Proulx
ssDcc
Montreal, Quebec

Keith Storey
Mark Shrimpton
Community Resources Services
St. John's, Newfoundland

External Advisors

Andrew Thompson, Fraser Gifford, Barristers and Solicitors, Vancouver, B.C.

Francis Bregha, retired, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Susan Carpenter, S .C. Associates, (formerly of Accord Associates), Washington, D.C.

Nick Poushinsky, Advisor, Ministry of Health, Government of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Jerome Delli Priscoli, U. S. Corps of Engineers, Arlington, Virginia

Larry Susskind, Harvard Negotiation Project, Boston, Massachusetts

Vern Millard, former Chairman, Energy Resources Conservation Board, Calgary, Alberta

This manual was produced on a Macintosh SE with a Laser Printer. Pagemaker page layout and Word 3 provided the software to complete the publication. Over 50 percent of the text was modemed from remote locations across North America. All graphics are scanned into the system with an Abaton scanning system.

PURPOSE OF THE MANUAL

The four volumes contained in this manual have been prepared for use by departmental agencies of the Government of Canada to assist senior managers in developing and implementing public involvement programs in the early stages of project planning, and in the Initial Environmental Evaluation (IEE) as defined within the Environmental Assessment and Review Process (EARP).

The manual is oriented to small and medium sized projects which, for the most part, should not require sophisticated public involvement programs or a significant allocation of resources.

Thus, the manual can be used to guide senior managers in the development of public involvement programs that may be needed by their department or agency as part of the environmental review process or for their own, smaller, internal projects which may never require a review process by other agencies.

ORGANIZATION OF THE MANUAL

The manual is organized as a set of four volumes:

Executive Overview:

This volume, targeted for the senior executive, provides a rationale for public involvement and a brief overview of the public involvement planning process.

Volume One: Management Implications for Decision Makers

This volume is directed to senior and line managers to assist them in determining when public involvement may be required in their organization and how it should be established with- in the agency. It is presented as a "stand alone" volume.

Volume Two: Developing a Public Involvement Program

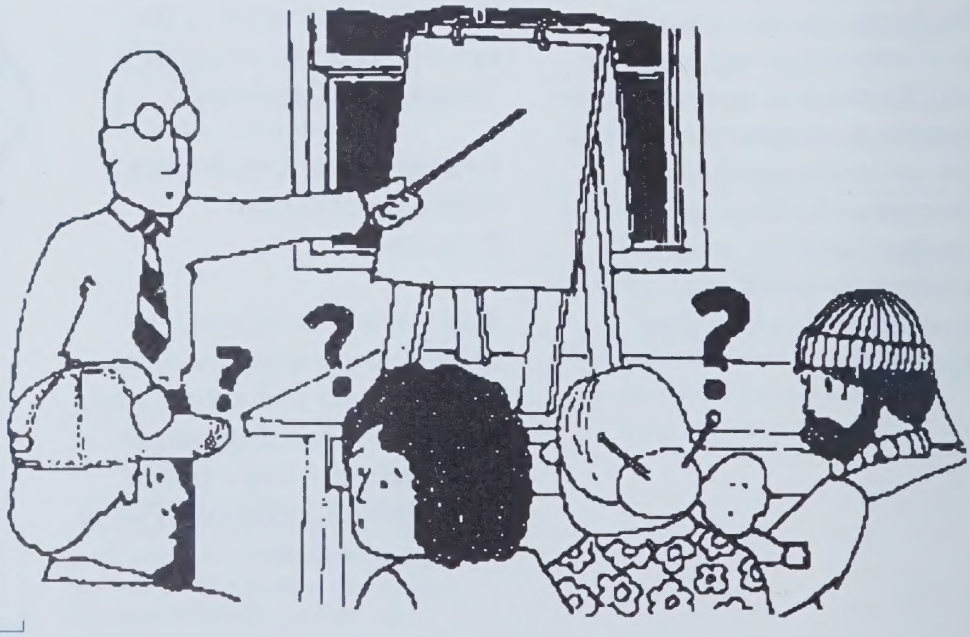
This volume is directed to those line managers and practitioners who will actually be responsible for designing and implementing a public involvement program. This is a process volume.

One thing I've learned is that public involvement is not a one time thing. You don't make it with the public by how you conduct one public involvement program. They want to see your track record. Show me that you'll not only listen to me this time, but the next time and the next.

The first time out is the hardest. You're doing your damndest to do a good job and the public's still as suspicious as ever. It almost makes you want to give up. But think about it from their point of view. After years of not being consulted you're coming out and saying "I'm a good guy, trust me." They've got to see that the change is for real, not a new game. The real payoff from public involvement isn't on any one program, but the cumulative effect of regular consultation on all important issues.

Volume Three: Public Involvement Techniques: A Dictionary of Ideas and Methods

This technical volume acts as a dictionary of possible methods and strategies which can be used by the practitioner. Methods are identified along with the processes which can be used to implement them. Their advantages and disadvantages are presented.



CONTEXT OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

WHAT IS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

There is no single, adequate definition of public involvement. The concept of public involvement is different for everybody involved. The best introduction is that public involvement is the process by which the views of all parties interested in an agency's decisions – interested and affected individuals, organizations, provincial, territorial and local governments, and other federal agencies – are integrated into an agency's decision making process.

The public involvement process provides a means by which public concerns, needs, and values are identified prior to decisions, so that the public can contribute to the decision making process. **Public involvement is two-way communication, with the overall goal being better decision making by the agency.**

People cannot provide informed input or opinion unless they have been adequately informed of the alternatives and their consequences, therefore, public information is always a central element in any public involvement program.

However, public involvement is much more than public information. Public information is typically limited to informing the public, or one-way communication. **The purpose of public involvement is both to inform the public and to solicit response regarding the public's needs, values, and proposed solutions or actions.**

The ultimate measure of the effectiveness of public involvement will be improved quality of the agency's decisions and being responsive to public input and requirements.

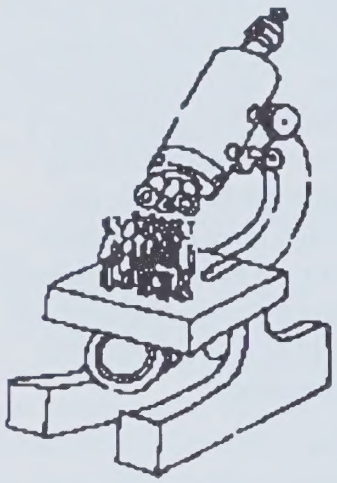
The most important qualities in any public involvement program are that the agency and its representatives are sincere, ethical and have integrity and commitment.

GOALS OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

An effective public involvement program is designed to meet the following goals:

- ❑ To identify public concerns and values;
- ❑ To gather economic, environmental, and social information from the public;

The essence of public involvement is two-way communication. It isn't genuine public involvement unless there's some information coming back from the public (although there may be times during a public involvement program when it is appropriate to be simply providing information).



There are many publics, rather than "the public".

- ❑ To inform the public about potential actions or alternatives, and the potential consequences of these actions;
- ❑ To develop two way contact;
- ❑ To develop and maintain credibility; and
- ❑ Ultimately, to improve the overall decision making of the agency.

WHEN IS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT NEEDED

The need for public involvement is related to the "significance" of the decision, or the extent to which the decision is "controversial".

One of the main emphases of public involvement is that the agencies and the publics come to perceive each other more as collaborators than as adversaries.

With early public involvement, though, the problem is to forecast which issues will be considered significant or controversial. An issue which appears as relatively insignificant to the agency may be seen as very significant by outside individuals or interests. By the time an issue becomes controversial, opportunities to prevent polarization or development of alternatives may be lost.

Public involvement will be needed when:

- ❑ The decision requires making choices between important social values;
- ❑ The results of a decision will significantly affect the interests – whether economic, political or so cial – of some people or groups more than others;
- ❑ The public perceives that it has a lot to win or lose by a decision;
- ❑ The decision involves a subject which is already a source of controversy; or
- ❑ The agency needs positive public support or action to implement a decision.

Most decision processes will benefit from some public involvement. The thrust of this manual is to encourage the increasing use of public involvement at early stages in the decision process, no matter how small the project.

WHO IS THE PUBLIC

A public is any person, persons or group of people that have a distinctive interest or stake in an issue.

The public is not a single entity, a monolithic whole. Rather it is a constantly shifting multiplicity of affiliations, interests, and alliances. There are many publics, rather than "the public".

The Practitioners Speak.....

Once an issue starts to grow it's a lot like a grass fire. If it can be contained in the first 48 hours or so, it won't turn into much. But if it goes past that, you may never get it out. Suppose you've proposed to build a transmission line or a new highway, and I'm afraid I might be affected. The first thing I do is phone a few neighbors. Now they're frightened too. Because we don't know much about it, imagination begins to run wild. An unknown threat is always scarier than a known threat. Next we start asking questions of people we respect as community leaders – local elected officials, or the head of an interest group. If they get all excited too, then the fire starts to rage out of control. But, if when we talk to these people, they already know about the project and can reassure us, then the fire is contained. We may still oppose the project, but the fear which really stokes the fire has been taken away.

You've got to be out "on the ground" early to contact the elected officials or community leaders. If you wait for six months, and then inform them only because you've got a public hearing coming up, you don't have any firebreak, and you may get burned.

People participate when they are strongly affected. They do not participate when they believe they are not affected or cannot affect the issue to any extent. People may see themselves as affected for a variety of reasons, including:

- ❑ proximity
- ❑ economics
- ❑ social/environmental concerns
- ❑ values

Public involvement seldom reaches "the general public". It always focuses on a narrower range of the public who view themselves as affected by the decision. Also, "the public" changes for each issue, and grows larger as a decision gets closer and its consequences are better understood.

In designing public involvement programs, it is far more useful to think of different levels and segments of "the public". These might include:

- ❑ Decision makers or technical staff in other fed-

Use the public as a resource - don't view it as a stumbling block.

The success of PI programs inevitably depends to a significant extent on the personal rapport and trust of the various parties. If trust respect and sympathy are not present, then public involvement will not succeed.

eral, territorial, provincial, or local government agencies;

- ❑ The constituencies of other federal, provincial, or local governmental agencies;
- ❑ Leaders and/or the constituencies of organized interest groups;
- ❑ Directly affected individuals;
- ❑ Individuals concerned with similar issues;
- ❑ Individuals or groups who may see themselves as affected when they receive more information about the issue; and
- ❑ People who have been informed about the issue, but choose not to participate at this time.

Remember, however, that interest groups will differ on each and every project. Do not assume that they will remain constant.

Not all of these publics will choose to participate, nor will they be interested in all aspects of the decision making process. As a result, "the public" in a particular public involvement program may change from stage to stage. This may result in a public involvement program using several different involvement techniques at the same time, each designed to reach a different segment of the public.

PLANNING FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Types of public involvement range from persuasion, in which the agency makes all the decisions, to self determination, where the authority is entirely outside the control of the agency. Most traditional public involvement programs have only utilized the basic types, however, more recently, there has been a move towards concepts such as joint planning and delegated authority.

Degrees of public involvement can range from public information, where the goal is to inform the public about a decision, to inviting the public to be heard before a decision is made, to more encompassing approaches, where the public can influence a decision directly or be given the latitude to determine the decision in partnership with the agency.

Figure 1
Types of Public Involvement

(First - least public involvement Last - most public involvement)

Persuasion
The use of public involvement techniques in legitimate endeavours to change attitudes without raising public expectations of participating in the planning process.

Education
The use of information dissemination and general instruction to create an awareness of programs and issues.

Information Feedback
The distribution, by the authority, of information on a policy planning situation on which the authority has a stated position and the request for public feedback on the position.

Consultation
Use of formal dialogue between authorities and public based on initially established mutually accepted objectives.

Joint Planning
Shared decision making. The public is represented on departmental planning boards, is given voting, and decision making authority. Issues should be geographically specific and understandable by local participants.

Delegated Authority
The transfer of responsibilities, normally associated with the authority, to the public or other levels of government possessing the necessary expertise.

Self Determination
The undertaking of the planning process by the public directly.

One of the greatest challenges for the public involvement practitioner is to balance public input. Judgement is required to balance this input from the general public with that from the special interest groups. It is often easy to respond only to the "squeaky wheel".. make sure you know what the general population is thinking as well.

Perception is reality.

Figure 1 presents a broad spectrum of public involvement approaches. The first two, Persuasion and Education, are not truly public involvement, although they are important in combination with other approaches. At the other end of the spectrum, Delegated Authority and Self Determination may only be appropriate if your agency has substantial flexibility in its mandate. This means that the most feasible range of approaches will be those of Information Feedback, Consultation, and Joint Planning.

Selecting the approaches to employ will be part of the process outlined in Figure 2.

It is critical to note that the use of only one selected technique is not adequate to meet all the requirements and demands from divergent publics at different stages of the process. A sociological term called "triangulation" is im-

The Practitioners Speak.....

One of the lessons I've learned is to accept what people feel. You don't have to agree or disagree with it, just accept that's how they feel. I remember doing a training program on how to run public meetings. One of the participants was a real cynic, and didn't buy this thing about accepting people's feelings. We were suggesting that all that should be done was to verbally summarize what each speaker said, and keep a running summary on a flip chart where everybody could see what was being recorded. He thought it was his job to straighten people out.

A couple of weeks later, he was conducting a public meeting and at some point in the meeting someone began playing a guitar and leading the audience in singing a song against the agency. The person leading the meeting was smart enough to realize that if he tried to be the hard guy and stop it, he would probably have a riot on his hands. So, he decided, "What the heck, maybe I'll try that stuff they taught in the course." He just relaxed and waited until the song was over, and then he summarized the sentiments of the song, checked with the guitar player to be sure the summary seemed fair, and had one of his staff write the summary on a flip chart. Guess what happened? The entire audience gave him a round of applause.

Figure 1
Phases in the Public Involvement Planning Process

Phase 1. Early Consultation

Early "reconnaissance" is required to determine the major public issues which could be raised by a project proposal, the likely level of public interest, the most likely participants and the key individuals who will represent them.

Phase 2. Initial Planning

Five detailed preparatory steps lead to the development of a public involvement action plan. The steps include: identifying the agency's decision making process, identifying publics, identifying special characteristics of the situation, writing specific objectives, and determining information exchange requirements.

Phase 3. Development of Action Plan

Action planning begins with choice of public involvement methods keyed to the previous two phases. The Action Plan includes establishment of intra-agency communications, commitment of resources and the scheduling of activities essential to conducting the public involvement methods selected.

Phase 4. Implement the Plan

Evaluation of the public involvement process proceeds in conjunction with monitoring of the progress of the original agency's project. Evaluation of the results of public involvement is carried out according to guidelines which emphasize both participant satisfaction with the process and ultimate effect on the project.

Phase 5. Post Decision Public Involvement

Continued involvement is important for many of the reasons that early involvement is useful. After the decision, the public can be involved in further planning, implementation, mitigation, compensation and evaluation of the project. This is especially true with those aspects of the project which directly affect the public. Also, if the project does not go ahead, it is very important to tell the public that this is the situation and the circumstances that led to the decision.

portant to present here. Triangulation involves the use of several different techniques on the same project. If similar patterns or trends result from all the techniques, then the results are accurate, and you are on the right path. If they are divergent, then one or more of the approaches may be giving you innaccurate information. You will have to determine which is correct.

Be pro-active towards the public at the outset and take the initiative; then cultivate their shared responsibility.

Be willing to be open from the beginning.

Figure 2

Steps in Developing and Implementing a Public Involvement Program

PHASE 1

EARLY CONSULTATION

- ❑ Informal "overview" consultation to detemine the major issues which are raised by a project proposal, the level of public interest, the most likely participants, and the key individuals who will represent them

PHASE 2

INITIAL PLANNING

- ❑ Identify the agency's decision making process
- ❑ Identify the publics
- ❑ Determine information exchange requirements
- ❑ Identify special characteristics of the situation
- ❑ Clarify objectives for the public involvement program

PHASE 3

DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTION PLAN

- ❑ Schedule detailed activities and techniques for PI process
- ❑ Establish intra-agency communications
- ❑ Commit resources

PHASE 4

IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

- ❑ Carry out, monitor and evaluate the public involvement program

PHASE 5

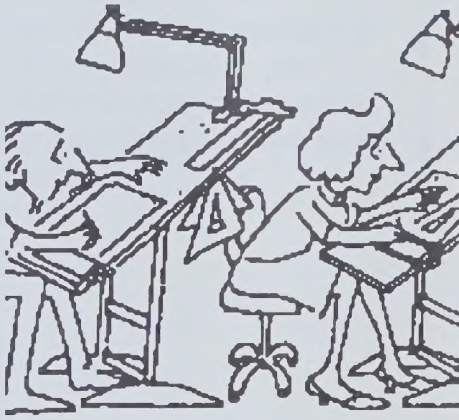
POST DECISION PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- ❑ Complete all requirements for the post decision public involvement process

The Practitioners Speak .....

The establishment of a tripartite committee of community, company and government representatives in Fort McKay has meant a profound change in the way problems are dealt with. Previously, confrontation was the norm; now, government departments and agencies have been able to adopt a more sympathetic and creative approach to problem solving in the cooperative committee environment.

The tripartite interface committee was able to successfully deal with a new, billion dollar company proposal without the need for a public hearing. The company estimates that this saved it $200,000. The community benefitted because the review process identified several potential community programs and facilities. Funding was subsequently obtained for these facilities. The government benefitted by being able to participate in a program that permitted creative and constructive developments.



Multiple techniques also protect you in the advent that one of the techniques you have chosen is not appropriate for the particular public or the situation at hand. What do you do if no one comes to your public meeting and you have based your entire planning process on the data from the meeting? If you have used several techniques, you have a "fall-back position" in that you can utilize the other techniques.

Figure 2 outlines the steps required within each of the five phases of public involvement planning. This diagram is also used as the organizational framework for the planning process presented in Volume Two.

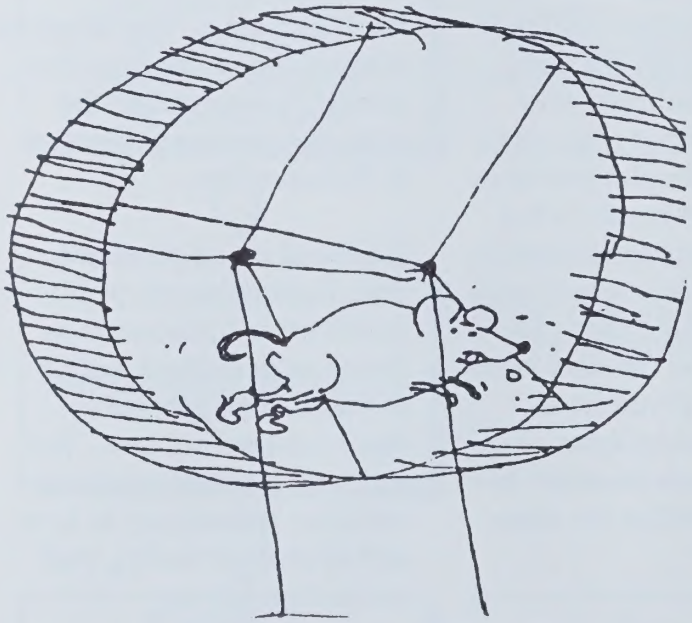
It should be emphasized that, in practice, no public involvement process is as linear as described in this manual. The process is more an iterative one. For example, parts of a process are often redesigned as a result of the monitoring and evaluation phase.

REASONS FOR PREPARING A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

There are several important reasons for preparing a plan:

Systematic Analysis:
The planning process requires careful analysis of how public involvement fits into the decision making process, which publics are likely to be concerned, and how their comments can be most effectively solicited. Since this analysis is crucial to effective public involvement, preparation of a plan is simply preparation for doing a good job, and a way of ensuring that you have designed a program adequate for the particular issue. It is possible to do a good job of systematic planning without writing a formal plan, just as it is possible to write a plan without doing good analysis, but preparing a plan provides a structure encouraging better analysis.

Integration in Decision Making:
As discussed in previous chapters, one of the most important characteristics of effective public involvement is that it is an integrated part of the decision making process. The planning process used in preparing your plan is designed to ensure that this integration occurs.



Nothing is more terrible than activity without insight.
Thomas Carlyle

Internal Coordination: Implementation of effective public involvement requires a variety of staff from different departments within an agency. In addition to the program departments directly involved with the issue, public involvement may also involve:

❑ publications staff to prepare brochures, reports, newsletters;

❑ media relations staff to prepare news releases, obtain publicity, purchase advertisements;

❑ legal/regulatory compliance staff to ensure that your decision making process and public involvement program comply with all legal and regulatory requirements;

❑ local or regional office staff who will be responsible for local logistics and may play a very important role in your program; and

❑ technical staff from other departments who may need to make presentations or answer questions during public meetings.

The value of a public involvement plan is that it clarifies who needs to do what, by when. If other parts of the organization have a "piece of

The Practitioners Speak.....

In the early days the timing of our public involvement activities was often based on the "nightmare indicator". We'd wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat realizing that we hadn't talked to the public in months. So we'd go out and hold some kind of public meeting– it never occurred to us there was anything else to do – and we'd learn a lot of stuff that, if we'd known it three months sooner, might have had a lot of impact on what we were doing. But, since we didn't want to throw out three months of work, we'd charge ahead. Then the public got frustrated because nothing they said had an impact.

Finally, we realized that we had to sit down and plan ahead for when and why in the process we'd talk to the public. **One of the big payoffs was how much time it saved.** Staff members who'd been complaining about the time public involvement took suddenly discovered that it was taking time because it was tacked on to the process, not an integral part of it. **Once it was integrated into the project planning process, the time required decreased dramatically.**

You must remember not to limit yourself to only one method or technique when designing a public involvement program. Putting "all your eggs in one basket "can result in the downfall of the process you are trying to achieve. Divide your resources over several techniques. What do you have if no-one shows up to your public meeting and you have no flexibility to develop something else?

A basic rule of thumb is to give people information about the project and the process, the major decision points and key information requirements at the earliest time. ***Then keep them updated.*** *If you don't have the answers in the early stages, let the public know this and let them know when they can expect answers or further information.*

Be honest about what you can and can't do – don't foster unrealistic expectations.

the action", their involvement in preparing or reviewing the public involvement plan is one way of getting their commitment to the program.

More than this, the preparation of a plan provides an opportunity for different sections of the agency to discuss the expectations as to what kind of public involvement is needed. Sometimes disagreements between different groups in the organization do not surface until a public involvement program is well underway. The result can be that support services needed from other parts of the organization are not provided when needed, or that the agency may appear divided or inconsistent in its contact with the public. The plan provides a forum for discussing and negotiating these differences in advance, before it affects your ability to implement an effective program.

Management Review:
The plan provides a document for management review of proposed public involvement programs. The plan gives management the information it needs to understand the potential political significance of an issue, and establish any problem indicators from the beginning. It ensures that the chances of management being taken by surprise are greatly reduced, and it also gives staff a mechanism for alerting management to political implications of which management might otherwise be unaware.

Public Review:
One way of gaining credibility for a potentially controversial decision making process is to provide opportunities for interested groups or individuals to review the public involvement plan. Their commitment to the process may increase their willingness to live with the outcome of the process. Giving groups an opportunity to review the plan also establishes your willingness to work with them, and reassures them of their opportunities to participate. If they do not believe your proposed program is adequate, it also gives you time to adjust accordingly. Typically, only organized groups with a direct interest in an issue will be interested in reviewing the plan.

Documentation:
If there are challenges to the adequacy of the program, the existence of a documented plan helps the agency to show the rationale for the level of public involvement activity chosen.

SUPPORT FROM DECISION MAKERS AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The decision-makers and senior management have a considerable impact on how public involvement is carried out within an agency, even though they are usually not directly involved in the day-to-day activities of a public involvement program. Management influences the success of a public involvement program in more subtle ways including the style of decision making, the organizational structure of the agency, and through the resources and training made available to the public involvement process.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT REVIEW AND SUPPORT

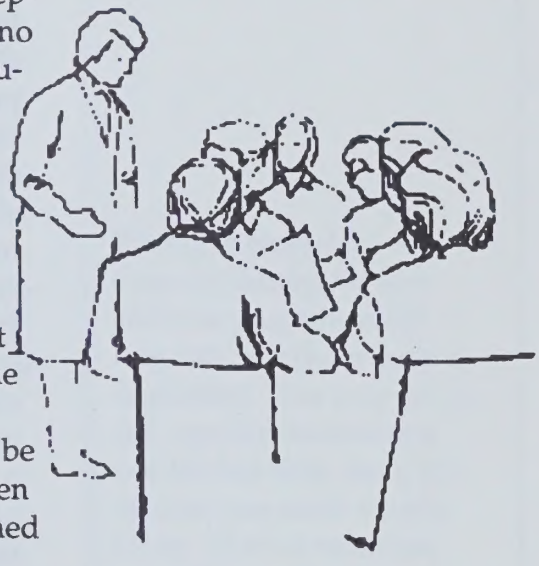
It is important that senior management review, support and be comfortable with, any decision making process which involves the public.

There are key points in any process where these decision makers should be involved. These points should be agreed upon upfront, with the decision makers, so that they are available when needed and not involved when they should not be there. Also, it must be remembered that different decisions are made at different levels and by different decision makers within the organization. All these conditions must be made explicit at the beginning of the process.

In working with the public, it is best to present any constraints up front, rather than risk altering the process to accommodate changing constraints or limitations. The public may feel misled and become resentful if unexpected changes occur part way through the process. They may become more skeptical than if there had been no public involvement opportunities provided.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IS INTEGRAL TO PROJECT PLANNING

Public involvement must be an integral part of the project planning process. Public involvement cannot be an add-on, put in place when the public becomes concerned about the decisions being made. Public involvement must be planned for from the very beginning of the process just like any other technical consideration. It must have the total support of the project team from the beginning if it is to be successful.



Much of the original resistance to consulting with the public is a fear of the unknown, a fear of what could happen.

INITIATING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE AGENCY

There is no "no-risk" time to begin implementing public involvement. An agency just beginning the implementation of public involvement programs often faces the problem that offering public involvement opportunities on some issues can create an expectation that opportunities should be offered on all decisions, including decisions that are nearing implementation. Managers are often afraid that a consequence of providing public involvement opportunities for one decision will raise questions about why public involvement was not offered on other decisions made earlier. Public pressure may even build to re-open such decisions for full public involvement. Yet, obviously, it is not possible to back up and re-examine every decision that the agency has made. Experience has shown that this can be a legitimate concern, but that rarely has the problem been as large as anticipated.

RECOGNIZING TIME AND BUDGET REQUIREMENTS

It is important that management not underestimate the additional time and costs of public involvement, so that realistic budgets and schedules are established.

It could take several years of significant public involvement, education and effort before everyone in an agency accepts that management is "serious" about public involvement. Management imposition of unrealistic time limits or budgetary constraints on public involvement programs during this period will be interpreted as lack of support, rather than as management efforts to control costs.

Time is also required because communicating with the public almost invariably requires a combination of disciplines or a team approach. Yet, people do not become a team simply by being designated as such. Effective teams are built. Most have worked together previously and have developed trust and confidence in each other.

Similarly, it usually takes several years of effective public involvement before the public begins to really trust the public involvement process. The same is true of staff. For example, it may take several years for people throughout an agency to believe that the

agency is committed to public involvement. As a result, implementation of public involvement is often uneven, depending on which organizational unit is involved. This can also send mixed signals to the public, if one component of the agency is implementing an effective public involvement program while at the same time a different group in the same agency is running a pro-forma public involvement program.

DIRECT INVOLVEMENT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Senior management can demonstrate its support for public involvement by being present at important public meetings. This does not mean that they should always run the meeting or control the meeting. It may be far more useful, in fact, for someone from senior management to open the meeting, announce that he or she intends to listen very carefully to the public comment, then turn the meeting over to someone else who is skilled in meeting leadership. When management is "up front" at a meeting it can encourage grandstanding from the audience, and commitments may be made under the pressure of the circumstance which may be regretted later. When meeting leadership is given to someone else, it establishes that the person leading the meeting is doing so not out of status or rank, but simply to provide the necessary structure, order and facilitation so that the meeting can be effective.

KNOWING WHEN A PROJECT IS IN TROUBLE

Everybody who has had much experience in public involvement has had the experience of badly underestimating the level of public controversy on some issues, and overestimating interest on others. This is, of course, one of the major reasons for early public involvement. Early involvement provides the opportunity to assess the level of public concern before the pressure has begun to build. In addition, early public involvement also allows the manager to establish relationships with the key interested parties. It is wise to stay in frequent, informal communication with these people and groups as the issue develops, because this kind of regular communication is the best possible "early warning system".

But how can the manager tell when an issue is heating up? Experts on conflict resolution say that there is a predictable "path of escalation" which occurs in conflicts if nothing intervenes to halt the escalation. The following are a list of indicators that an issue may be escalating:

Timing is everything – You can develop the most elaborate program which may take months or years to implement. You may get the best possible involvement and the best data, but if the decision was made months before, of what value was the public involvement program?

❑ Issues begin to proliferate, with new groups adding new issues;

❑ Issues move from the specific case to generalizations, e.g. from opposition to a specific project to "anti-development" generally;

❑ Criticisms of the proposed action turn into attacks against the agency or individuals;

❑ People who are considered "moderate" begin to get concerned about the issue;

❑ Political leaders (at whatever level of government) begin to use the issue for their own political gain;

❑ More radical leaders take over established groups; and

❑ Normal channels of communication shut down, and people begin to talk only to those people who agree with them.

If more than one of these events occurs, the heat is on, and only a significant commitment to public involvement is likely to keep this issue from escalating until it is completely outside management's control. As emphasized at the outset, early public involvement is the best way of preventing this kind of escalation.

The Practitioners Speak.....

The bottom line in public involvement isn't sophisticated techniques, although they sometimes help; the real issue is whether or not the public gets the message that you really care about what they have to say, and that you are willing to try to respond. I remember training two people to go out and set up public involvement programs. One of them was Joe Slick. He was fast on his feet. He had an answer for anything. He could have talked Adam out of his fig leaf. The other one was Janey Sincere. She was very quiet and unsure of herself in front of audiences and didn't have a great presentation. But, she really cared. Guess who got eaten alive? Joe Slick was back in the ward for repairs in just a couple of weeks. No matter how much Janey Sincere botched things up, what really came across was that she wanted to hear what people had to say, and it would make a difference. **People will forgive a lot of mistakes if the genuine intent is there. If you're just going through the motions, people get the message.**

STAFFING AND ORGANIZATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The success of a public involvement program is dependent on a number of organizational factors which must be considered when developing, planning and implementing a program.

ORGANIZATIONAL DECISION MAKING STYLE

The job of the person who is running the public involvement program is made easier if the management style of the agency is consistent with the democratic principles and methods which the corporate staff are being asked to espouse. If the classic organizational values of efficiency, economy and control prevail, they will conflict with principles such as involvement in decision making, and access to information. Public involvement efforts are often doomed if decisions within the agency are being made in such a way that information from the public is either ignored by the decision maker(s) or so filtered down that it has little impact. A public involvement program is unlikely to be "able to deliver" if decisions within the agency are not also made in a consultative manner.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS

The qualities that make an individual successful in the noisy, emotionally laden world of public involvement are often not adequately measured by organizations, so that the person responsible for public involvement may have few rewards for doing a good job. If organizations want to reward people who deal effectively with the public the criteria will have to shift from rewarding people who "keep the lid on" to rewarding those who succeed in getting resolution, even if the process was noisy. And since public involvement will not lead to successful resolution each time, there must be rewards for risktakers, even though the individuals may not always successful. This will require a change from the more common performance criteria such as how smoothly a project is operating or whether it is completed within budget and on schedule.

The selection of the person who will work with the public or coordinate public involvement programs is critical to the agency's success. The agency must locate people with the right attitude to work with people and then train them in the additional skills which they may need. You cannot train a person to change their attitude.

PROVIDING A MODEL OF OPEN COMMUNICATION

It is essential that top management provide a model of open communication to all interest groups. This "early warning system" is one of the means of preventing issues from escalating. Management should not communicate only with groups considered part of its political constituency while avoiding others. This can create the impression that the agency is biased, and its communications are just propaganda selling the agency's point of view, rather than objective appraisal.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

Ideally the person working with the public should also be one of the persons responsible for making the decision. The decision maker who is too far removed from public contact does not experience the emotional reality of public opinion. Part of the public's message is the intensity with which it feels certain things, and if the decision makers are insulated from this intensity they may misjudge the significance of the public's concerns.

The Practitioners Speak.....

I remember one large government program where communities were funded to come up with a community plan. Local committees were set up, large staffs were hired, contracts were given to research consulting firms, and as something of an afterthought, they even had a public involvement officer. The only problem was that the public involvement officer was always a junior staff member, sort of a pimple on the body politic. This staff person would run around getting all kinds of comments from the public, but could never get anybody to pay attention to it. Management had done its job by hiring him, they didn't have to listen to him as well. As I remember it, after this experience a number of public involvement officers decided that planning wasn't the field for them, and decided to open up commercial franchises instead.

You've got to get management to feel that the public involvement program is their program. They may have staff to help them run it, but they need to have an emotional stake in the program or it's not going to change anything.

If managers are going to effectively implement public involvement programs they must receive adequate training and technical assistance in the form of experts from other agencies or departments, public involvement consultants, manuals and guides. There must also be adequate agency incentives for effective public involvement, to ensure that the manager is committed to its implementation; agency policy and requirements for public involvement must be clear and widely disseminated; and the individual manager must have the resources, in terms of budget and staffing, to carry out the program. Under these conditions involvement is truly a normal way of doing business within an agency.

The alternative is to build up a public involvement staff with specialized skills to run public involvement programs. But there are risks with this approach as well. The problem with the staff approach is that it separates the public involvement process from the decision maker. The public involvement or public affairs staff is put in the unenviable position of trying to translate the public's concerns to the decision maker and vice versa. Without the program manager having a sense of personal responsibility for the public involvement program, he or she is less likely to be responsive to the comments received from the public.

As a result, most agencies must find a balance between holding the individual manager accountable for the effectiveness of public involvement efforts affecting his or her programs, and ensuring that public involvement or public affairs staff provide adequate support. This means that in effect public involvement becomes a team approach, with the manager responsible for the program, but with public involvement staff providing the guidance and support to ensure that the program is a success.

COORDINATION WITHIN THE AGENCY

Once public involvement has become a way of life, there may be several public involvement programs going on at any given moment, often involving different parts of the organization. Invariably there is a need to coordinate these programs. This is to ensure that there is not unreasonable overlap, and to be certain that different groups within the agency are doing a good job of identifying when public involvement is needed. There is also a need to pinpoint deficiencies and ensure that needed support is provided. Typically this problem has been solved either by appointing a public involvement coordinator or manager, or establish

ing a public involvement team consisting of the key managers most likely to be responsible for public involvement programs. Sometimes the two approaches have been combined, with the coordinator acting as the staff to the team, responsible for implementation of the team's decisions.

The advantage of the single coordinator is that one person is clearly responsible, while accountability can get blurred with a team. The advantage of a managerial team is that, when managers take responsibility for coordinating the program, the risk is reduced that they will feel that public involvement is a purely staff function. Some agencies have begun with a public involvement manager, and later – after the organization as a whole has become more committed to the need for public involvement – developed a team of managerial level people to advise the public involvement manager on the overall program.

Whether there is a single coordinator, or a management committee, the coordination function which must be performed includes these tasks:

❑ Consulting with program or project managers and assisting management in identifying upcoming issues requiring public involvement programs;

❑ Developing mechanisms ensuring that information regarding public involvement strategies, techniques, and successes or failures is transmitted across organizational lines;

❑ Coordinating training and professional development activities for people conducting public involvement programs;

❑ Assisting management in evaluating the adequacy of public involvement programs in the agency;

❑ Coordinating the preparation of media and public involvement materials that can be utilized by several or all the public involvement programs;

❑ Advising management on the need for policy or guidance regarding public involvement activities;

❑ Developing research programs to encourage innovative approaches or evaluate effectiveness;

❑ Ensuring that all organizational units involved in a given project are aware of the public involvement program and respond in a consistent manner, to avoid confusing the public or cancelling the positive effect of the public involvement programs; and

❑ Ensuring that communication continues with the public during the often lengthy time lag between planning and implementation.

HINTS TO DECISION MAKERS REVIEWING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

Some factors to be considered in manage-ment's review of public involvement programs include:

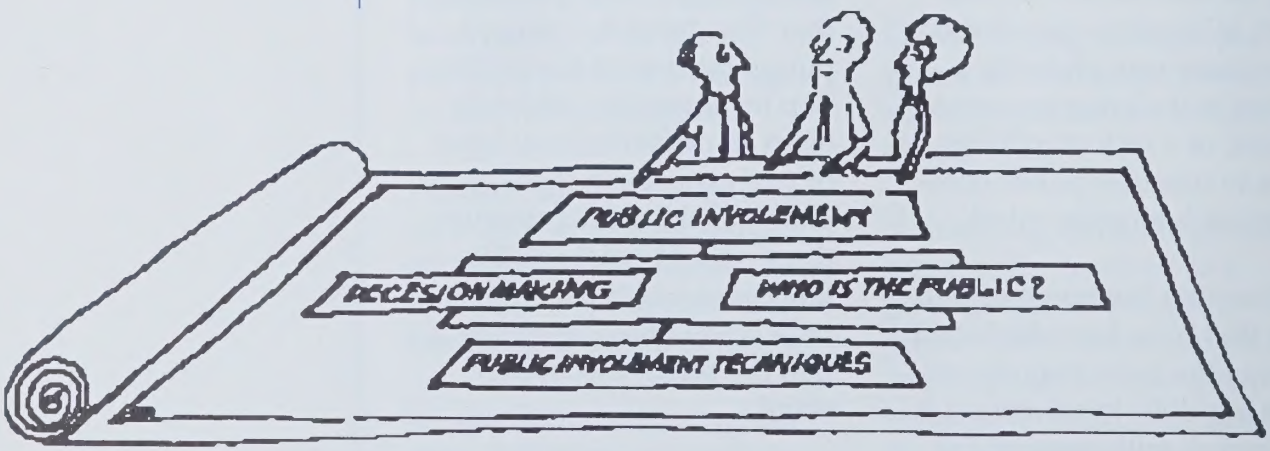
❑ **Look for links between the public comment and the decisions made.** If a public involvement program is to be at all worthwhile, it must be based on the assumption that the comments of the public will have some influence on decisions made throughout the process. If there is no visible connection between the public comment and decisions made along the way, e.g. the alternatives considered, mitigation considered, then there was probably a defect in the program somewhere, or a lack of willingness to consider public comment with an open mind.

❑ **Examine the range of publics that have been included.** One of the most frequent errors in public involvement is to consult with some of the publics, but to ignore some group that sees itself as significantly affected by the decision. This is likely to be the group that files a lawsuit, or goes outside the normal decision making process in some way.

❑ **Check for "visibility mechanisms".** In most major decisions, there are periods when technical studies are underway and the decision making process loses visibility to the public. On controversial issues, a loss of visibility can lead to suspicion of secret deals or data being altered which undermines the credibility of the technical reports when they finally emerge. Check to be sure that mechanisms are in place to maintain communication with important publics during these "low profile" periods.

❑ **Insist that documents be in the public's language.** The combination of "technicalese" and agency "bureaucratese" makes agency presentations incomprehensible and conveys the impression that the agency is trying to put up barriers to the public. Top management, which is often an organizational layer or two away from those people making the presentations, should point out blatant cases and insist on their translation into a language that the public can understand.

❑ **Role play the various interests as part of management review**. Many decisions which lock agencies into adversarial relationships could be avoided if management anticipated the probable reaction of the various publics to agency actions and responses. One way to do this is to role play the anticipated positions of the key interest groups to a proposed action, such as, "if I were a large industrial user, I would feel...". This helps train everybody to understand a range of perspectives, not just the traditional position of the agency. Of course, this kind of role play is ultimately no substitute for actual participation by interest groups.



TRENDS IN PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This section of the manual is presented to increase the awareness of senior managers to some of the trends which are currently affecting the field of public involvement. While there are many trends which could be included, two relate closely to the issues which have been raised in this volume.

The first trend discusses techniques for senior decision makers to monitor current issues of public concern and priority. Through the techniques presented in Volume 2, the decision maker can be better prepared and more knowledgeable of the situations thereby responding in a more pro-active manner to these public and governmental issues.

The second trend relates to building concensus with the publics with which you will have to work. While this has been an ongoing strategy in the United States during the past few years, it has been slow to catch on in Canada. This is due primarily to the different political and judicial systems in the two countries. As stated by numerous American counterparts, "Whatever you do, stay away from the court system. Every project we now propose ends up going through the legal system. This is causing tremendous and costly delays on all projects". The response in the United States has been toward more public involvement programs, many of which now involve a variety of mediation and concensus building techniques.

These two trends are outlined in the following sections.

DEVELOPING AN ONGOING ISSUES MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Issues management acts as an early warning system. Instead of reacting as issues arise, an organization is able to select issues of primary importance and plan how best to affect their final resolution. Issues management is a means of helping an agency's strategic planners recognize possible changes in the external environment and plan to meet these changes. A structured program to manage issues places an organization in better control of events. It helps an organization with its vital functions of setting goals and adapting to the socio-political environment. And for those who work with external audiences on a day to day basis, it provides a "position bank" regarding what may be, or has been, said on key issues.

The actions of key public and private sector audiences and the media can have untold influence on the ability of a government agency to effectively carry out its mandate. Consequently, responding to key audiences on public policy issues or key projects has become a growing problem for larger (and not so large) government organizations. The challenge is to respond in a way that increases an organization's chances of affecting the outcome of major issues and in a manner which is consistent with what that organization has said and done previously.

The term "issues management" is actually a misnomer since issues can rarely be managed. It would be more accurate to speak of "response management". Whatever we call it, it is a systematic way of organizing many actors in a large organization to anticipate, identify, and respond to specific problems, opportunities or public policy issues in a consistent and coordinated manner.

Issues Management is a boundary-spanning function with one eye cast inside the organization, and the other focused outside, monitoring events which could affect the organization's plans.

Managing issues also performs an integrative function within an organization, and prevents inconsistent policy statements coming from the same organization. As one example, separate committees of a volunteer organization – tax and economics – were on the verge of making separate and conflicting representations to government. A structured issues management program would increase the prospect of separate groups working together to debate the issue internally and work out the best position for the organization.

An issues management system also can prevent the kind of situation where an Assistant Deputy Minister drafts a position on an issue to the press, the Minister then makes an announcement, and the staff working on the issue read about the decision in the newspaper.

An issues management system should ensure the agency's positions on key issues are updated and available to those who are relating to both internal and external audiences. Issues management involves agency response to an issue as well as planning the communicating with key publics if necessary. Development of such an issue management system is detailed in Volume Two of this manual.

ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIATION AND CONCENSUS BUILDING APPROACHES

Recently, public involvement in environmental issues has been characterized by an increasing use of concensus building approaches, and by conflict resolution techniques such as environmental mediation.

Although people in the democratic western countries have come to substitute majority rule for concensus, the political fact of life is that a well organized, committed minority can effectively veto virtually any action. The decision as to whether or not a concensus is a necessary goal for your public involvement program is based on a frank assessment of your ability to make something happen without it. If the opponents to a project have the power to veto the decision, or exact a high price by forcing a cumbersome review process, then concensus becomes the goal.

The Practitioners Speak.....

Let me tell you a story from the U.S. An electric power company had decided to set up a public advisory committee to review its rate structure, and asked me to help establish it. We got each member of the advisory group to agree to work towards a concensus, not just a majority vote. The way we explained it was: "Look, suppose you go to the Board of Directors and tell them we voted 14-12 in favour of a position. All you're really telling them is that you're badly divided and they're free to act in any way they want. Now if you go to them and say we support this position 26-0, they're going to have to take you seriously".

Everybody bought the idea, but the very first issue had one person holding out vehemently against the majority position. Most people just wanted to outvote her. But we reminded them that they promised to at least try to work out a consensus. So they had to stop and really listen to each other. The outcome was that they came up with a new way of providing funds for low income energy users which has since been adopted by most of the utilities in the U.S. **If you use majority vote, then you can just outvote them. but if you're trying to come up with a concensus, then you've really got to listen to each other....and the results may be impressive!!**

Given the highly democratic nature of many public interest groups, any move towards concensus building has to involve, directly or indirectly, much of their membership.

... a shift from confrontational approaches to a broadly based process of collaboration where interested parties, by working together, define and build on common ground.

Accepting concensus as a goal has several implications. The first requirement is to give up thinking about the problem in terms of "supporters-opponents". If a manager continues to think of people as adversaries, they will be just that. Instead, the attitude must be one of "we have to come up with an acceptable decision". The need for a concensus puts all key actors, including strong minority interests, at the negotiating table.

Above all, if a manager needs a concensus, every-body's interests must be taken seriously. The manager must think in terms of "How can I make the best deal available for each of these groups?" This does not mean that a group's stated position has to be automatically accepted. Groups may not have a realistic appraisal of what is in their best interest. What the manager does have to do is to find some way of responding to their interest, as distinct from their positions, sufficiently so that they "buy into" the eventual decision.

If concensus is to be achieved, early involvement is essential. Early involvement communicates that the agency values the ideas and concerns of out-side interests. During the early stages of decision making, it is possible for people to discuss their interests, rather than taking fixed positions. This greatly increases the likelihood that alternatives can be developed which incorporate these interests.

One of the challenges of public involvement is to learn to work effectively with people holding values other than those which have traditionally been the basis for decision making such as "economy" and "efficiency". It can be hard for agency staff to respond effectively to citizen values such as "social equity" or "environmental protection", unless they can be accommodated with little effect on "economy" or "efficiency". The result can be a cynicism about public involvement, and a return to confrontational approaches or legal battles.

The need for concensus will also mean that a manager will have to share more power throughout the decision making process. To achieve effective dispute resolution, all the key actors must be drawn into a mutual problem solving process: this means the sharing of managerial power, and also the resulting risks. Managers who share power actually gain power because they increase their understanding of the situation. Concensus building approaches should only be used if a manager has a real commitment to problem solving, not just a hope that this is a gimmick which will produce a quick agreement

without any real sharing of decision making power.

Concensus does not have to mean that everybody feels equally good about the outcome. In practical political terms, a concensus simply means that all key actors agree that a decision is "the best deal available". Although all parties might have preferred a different outcome, when they look at the distribution of power, and the political forces at work, they accept that this is the best deal they are going to get.

Even this definition has limitations, because some groups believe they can get a better deal if nothing happens. Anytime a group can realistically accomplish more by immobilizing your ability to act, a concensus is unlikely. Effectively, the "best deal available" for such a group is no decision at all. If a manager needs to accomplish something now, then the decision will have to be structured in such a way that the group sees more of its interests being met by allowing the project to proceed than it does by blocking or delaying the project.

Final Thoughts from the Practitioners.....

- ❑ Public involvement must have two-way communication.
- ❑ Most decision processes will benefit from some public involvement.
- ❑ A public is any person or group of people with a distinctive interest or stake in an issue.
- ❑ The interested public will be different for every project.
- ❑ Use multiple techniques for public involvement.
- ❑ Senior management need to be involved in supporting and reviewing the public involvement program.
- ❑ For open communication to develop with the community, open communication is needed within the organization.
- ❑ Monitor current issues of public concern, as an "early warning system."
- ❑ If concensus is to be achieved, early public involvement is essential.

CA1 EP 60088N01
Canada. FEARO.
MANUAL ON PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN ENVIRONMENT
ASSESSMENT: PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING PUBLI
PROGRAMS. VOLUME 1. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

RESOURCE CENTRE
INST. FOR ENVIRON'L. STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO